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COURT HOUSES OF NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

Communicated by T. B. ROBERTSON, Eastville, Virginia.

For some years after the settlement of this county the county commissioners held their sessions sometimes in private houses, but usually at the most convenient tavern, as they were the chief meeting places of the inhabitants. The house of the Secretary, Porey, was one of the houses used. At first the population was small and this could be done without any great inconvenience. The first court held for "Accomacke," as the county was then called, was in 1632, but unfortunately it does not state where, though one can well imagine that Secretary Porey entertained the commissioners, as his interest in the affairs of the new county seemed considerable. Indeed he might be termed the father of the new settlement across the water, as it was then spoken of.

From that early day, when the commissioners gathered in a private room, till 1664, no court house is mentioned, but the houses where court was held, sometimes are found. By the latter year, however, the population of this half of the Virginia Eastern Shore had grown considerably, and it then contained some 1,500 souls, and they were well established and prosperous. Two churches—one in lower Northampton and the other in the upper parish—had been founded. So Col. William Waters, then high sheriff, was instructed to erect a suitable court house at the place called the "Town Fields." At the court of levies following he was allowed 5,286 pounds of tobacco for the work. He made the following report at that court showing the cost itemized:

FOR BUILDING A COURT HOUSE AT TOWN FIELDS.

Lt. Col. Wm. Waters:

This day Lieft. Coll Will Waters presented to the court an account of his disburse to this daye upon the court house likewise an account of the countie's creditt in his, the said Waters, hands, the sd account being by the court examined they find justly due to the sd Waters upon ballance of the sd account seven hundred twentee and two pounds of tobacco. Itt is therefore ordered that the sd Waters bee payed this ensueing yeare att the court of leavies out of the County Leavies eighteen hun-

dred-forty & one pounds of tobacco being due as above said, & likewise itt is ordered that the clerke putt the sd account upon Record.

Northamp^{n} County

Deb^{t} Lief. Coll Will Waters

pd. Capt Custis & his brother Wm Custis 33½ days of three men at 35 p. daye	1189½
" John Braddan 1 day work	25
" Booth Robins 3 hands help to raise the frame	36
" For 27½ days work Robt Warren att 35 p day is	962½
" " my man & 2 hands 2 days & for my cart & 2 hands 2 days	200
" " One stuck lock & one paire of hinges bougt of Mr Martin & Mr Foxcroft	42
" For bord & sound timber for stoods &c	209½
" for nails & spikes	480
" " drames att the raisinge the House &c	25
" " 41½ days worke of my man & for his dyett & for the carpenter's dyett & other dyett	1425
" " caskes for 4595^{p}	367½
" " mine own timber & for the use of sevreall things of mine about the house	324
	5286
Pd me by order of levie & by Capt Joanes toward this charge	2000
Pd so much in my hands due to our county ꝑ order of Assembly not disposed of as yett	2259
" 2 unfixt gunns remains of the war 160 & by old Iron sould to Charles Parkes 110 & by 2 Iron wedges 35	305
Moore 2 barrells of salt beefe allowed him for 500 pd tobacco the county had from Lower Norfolk formerly ordered to Wm Waters	722
	5286

This location seemed to be unsatisfactory to some of the inhabitants, so they secured an act of the "Grand" Assembly requiring the justices to put the question to a vote of the people, the householders and freeholders. In accordance with the act mentioned the vote was published to be held at "The Hornes" December 31st, 1677.

In Order Book No. 10, page 254, is found the following:

"Whereas by order of Assembly for enlargement of this county of Northampton the Inhabitants were left to their votes for making choice where the Court House should bee for their greatest & most convenience—and havinge this day mett accordinge to ye said order & an order of the last court grounded thereupon, Have voted that the Court for the future shall bee kept att ye place called 'The Hornes' where Henry Matthews now livith and that the next court to bee held for this county bee there kept."

At the April court following, the record states that Mr. Hancock Lee was sworn in as High Sheriff and Owen Marsh as subscheriff. The said Hancock Lee petitioned the court for a jail and the court ordered a "prison to be built forthwith by Henry Matthews, to be 15 feet square &c. and that he be allowed 1000 pounds of tobacco at the next levy" for the work. Order Book No. 10, page 254.

This location has been fully identified as the same as Eastville, and from the diagrams these two structures were on the east side of the road or street opposite the present court grounds.

In 1688 Joseph Godwin donated forty acres of land for county purposes and agreed to erect a new court house at his own cost if the justices would accept and use it. This offer was accepted, as will be seen by the following order:

JOSEPH GODWIN COURT HOUSE

To the Wor. his Ma^{tles} Justices of the Peace for the County of Northampton

Joseph Godwin of the county aforesaid sheweth that hee hath land neare adjacent to the maine Roade & the present court house and is willinge to give forty Acres thereof to this county for ever to serve for a Court house and other appurtenances and also to build the same at his owne proper costs & charges (hee only haveing the timber brought in place) and also for the further accomodation & decency to plaister and white lime the same (provided you will finde lime). If this his proposall & donation be acceptable, He requests you will signify soo much and he will by any act or acts Requested Confirm ye same & forthwith begin to build the said court house and in the interim yor worphs may (if you please) continue the court where at present it is.

Endorsed) The pet^{rs} proposall accepted by the court in the behalfe of themselves & the rest of the county and that the Boards & planks already provided for the intended court house that was to be built bee delivered ye said pet^{r} towards that hee assumes to build for the said of —. The pet^{r} building the court house according to the former dimensions agreed upon for that which was to have been built at the county charge and performing all thinges else consonant to the full purpert & contents of his peticion within expressed and yt. the same wth this endorsement bee entered upon Record. The land by Mr. Wm Kendall given the county for ye use of a court house is Ret^{d} unto him as freely as given.

Teste Dan Meche
C. C. Co. Northn.

Record.
Dec. 29 1687

A year or so later, Col. John Custis, then High Sheriff, petitioned the court for a jail near the new court house, and the court ordered Jacob Godwin to build one, but in the meantime the "old one at the old court house, the place called 'The Hornes,' to continue as the gaol till the new one is completed." Book 13, page 33. This shows that the Godwin Court House was some

where else than in Eastville, and was perhaps a mile or two up the road towards or near Hungars Bridge, as Bridgetown was then called. It certainly was near the road precinct of Richard Nottingham, then road surveyor for the road from "The Hornes" to the Bridge at Hungars, as he was ordered to clear the way to it.

In 1698 Mr. William Waters, then High Sheriff (evidently son of Coln. Wm. Waters), was instructed to put the old court house in repair. Book 14 page 4. Indicating that the justices had decided to return to the Eastville site.

The next court house referred to is the one erected by Wm. Rabishaw. The order for which is as follows below:

WM RABYSHAW CO. HO.

This day William Rabyshaw hath undertaken the building and erecting of a court house at a place called the horne old field, upon the Land of Mr. Savage, for 7000 pounds of Tobacco according to the Dimensions hereafter mentioned viz: the said court house to be 30 foot long and 20 foot wide from inside to inside, well framed of sawed timber except jice and Plate and to be overhead of 8 foot Pitch from Sill to plate and to be covered with white oake Shingells the sape to be taken out; upon oake lath; weatherboarded with good three-quarter inch pine Plank with an outside chimley to be well lathed and filled in and Plastered with a good Paire Stares all the upper flower to be Layed with good pine old Planke and the under part of the Pine flower to be well Plained two dores to be well hinged with hooks and hinges to the said house within the Bare where the justices is to sitt and that to bee raised and to be layed with plained old pine Plank Sawed out of old Pine and the sitt benches to be well Plained and the Railes for the Bare and the Dore at each ende of the Bare to be well hinged with hooks & hinges and to be an earthen flower except where the justices is to sitt are that to be done as aforesaid and the same to be viewed by too honest workmen as he goes along and all to be completed and ended workman-like between the date hereof and May come 12 month

which is in the year *1716* and the said Rabyshaw forthwith repair to the clerks ofice and there enter into bond with good security for his performance of the sd court house.

Robt. Howson
C. C. N.

19th day of Apr. 1715.
Order Book No. 15, p. 201.

Att a Court of Levey Held for Northampton by his Maj[ts] Justices of the Peace on the 27 day of Nov. 1716

To Robt. Howson as services done ye county as clark, & caske	1080
" Robt. Widgon for finding water & fire for the county	270
" Nathaniel Capill for being cryer to the court	864
" Mr. John Powell late sheriff, as by acc	1968
" Col. W[m] Waters for his attendance as Burgiss & sloop, time and man for the year 1714 being 47 days & caske	9137
" Mr. Charles Floyd for his attendance as Burgiss for year 1714 being 47 days & caske	6095
" Mr. John Harmonson for his attendance as Burgiss for the year 1715 being 44 days & caske	5703
" Mr. Charles Floyd for his attendance as Burgiss for for the year 1715 being 44 days & caske	5703
* * * * * * *	
To Mr. Hillary Stringer sheriff as by acc.	2204
" John Atkinson 44 days attendance with his sloope & man ye Burgess at the Assembly in yeare 1715	2855

"At a court of Levy held for Northampton County by his Maj[ts] Justices of the Peace this 5th day of December 1715."

(Among other entries the following:)

"To W[m] Rabyshaw for building the court house at Horns old field 7000

(This is 7000 pounds of tobacco.)

This court house (Rabishaw) is shown on a diagram of the prison bounds made in 1724 and spread on the records. The survey was made by Luke Johnson. Eastville was then designated as "The Horns." The Court House was built on the original site selected in 1677, the prison is shown three hundred feet north of the Court House, and the foundations can be noted now. The pillory is represented by the post with arms standing between the prison and the Court House.

June 10th 1724

Surveyed by order of the Court of Northampton County ten Acres of Land situate in the said County of Northampton, beginning at a gum tree standing by the branch near the court house water spring thence south 55½ easterly 13 chains, or 52 poles &c marked & bounde as by this platt is specified the which ten Acres is laid out for prisoners bounde at the charge of Abraham Bowker.

Luke Johnson Surveyor.

Laid down by a scale including 10 poles in one Inch.

Admitted to record 8th day of September 1724.

Godfrey Pole Cl—cur—

Book Deeds & Wills No 25, p. 209.

Following the Wm. Rabyshaw order comes that to Capt. John Marshall to erect a brick court house at a cost of 50,000 pounds of tobacco. This latter is the one still standing on the court yard here, used so long as a bar-room after the county had erected a better one.

THE BRICK COURT HOUSE

Court held for Northampton County 9th day of Dec. 1730.

The Court house of this county being much out of repair and not in A Condition for the Justices to do the county business in, which the court having taken into consideration came to A Resolution to build one of Brick and to treat with workmen who will undertake the same in Feb. Court next and it is ordered

that the sheriff give Public Notice hereof both in Accomack & this county.

Order Book No. 10, p. 60.

Northampton Ct. Mar. 9th 1731.

Mr. Thomas Savage offers to deed 10 acres to the Justices.

The justices aforesaid have given the old Ct. Ho. to said Savage.

Capt Wiliam Tazewell order to write the deed.

Order Book No. 10, p. 60.

At a Court held for Northampton County the 9th day of Feb 1731.

The court having in December coourt last past an order to treat wth workmen to build A Brick Court house for this county and this day several bidders appearing and Mr. John Marshall being the fairest proposition for the undertaking of the building at 50,000 pounds of Tobacco to finish it according to A Rough Scheme this day read in open Court to the proposers Ordered that the said Marshall give Bond with good & sufficient security in the sum of 10,000 pounds of Tobacco to finish the said work by the last day of December next.

John Robins
Thos Cobb Cl—Cur

Order Book No. 10, p. 66.

At a Court held for Northampton County for laying the County Levy the 30 Day of Nov. 1731

(Among other items:)

To Luke Johnson surveyor for surveying court house land	500
To John Marshall to be paid him down towards building the court house	25000
John Marshall, but not to be paid until the court house is finished	25000